







FWQA and WQA members met with Florida Rep. Greg Steube (center) and other legislators at the state's capitol to advocate for Senate Bill 66, which would require schools built before 1986 to install lead filtration systems.

faced lead contamination problems in Pittsburgh since 2015. Under a public-private partnership contract with Veolia, an international water company, and the Pittsburgh Water & Sewer Authority (PWSA), a new corrosion control chemical was introduced into the city's water system that led to an increase in lead levels. While the partnership with Veolia was ended, PWSA has been working to lower lead contamination levels and to replace lead service lines while providing drinking water filters to residents with high contamination levels.

"The program now I think is one of the best in the country," said Aly Shaw, environmental justice organizer for Pittsburgh United. Shaw and Pittsburgh United helped secure a legal settlement mandating lead service line replacement. "We are replacing lines at no cost to the residents and they are doing it really quickly. Last year, they replaced over 2,000 lines and this year they will do even more than that. I think other cities can learn from our eventual response to the crisis."

Community engagement has been crucial in PWSA's response, Shaw said. The authority has an advisory committee with people from the community to help shape the program in a more community-oriented way. PWSA also holds community meetings to raise awareness of the solutions available in the program.

**Aiming for an "A"**

Community engagement and accountability are essential when it comes to targeting lead in schools, according to John Rumpler, senior attorney and clean water program director for Environment America Research and Policy Center. Released March 21, 2019, Rumpler co-authored a report titled "Get the Lead Out," that assigned grades to 32 states and the District of

Columbia assessing their policies to protect children from lead contamination in water at schools. The report looks at several factors to assign state's grades, including efforts to proactively remove lead at the source, such as pipe remediation; preventative measures, such as filter installation; the threshold of lead tolerated in school drinking water; and lead testing and disclosure of testing results.

"Our first priorities were any policies that proactively get the lead out," Rumpler said. "Policies that remove lead-bearing fountains, faucets and plumbing, and policies that install filters to prevent contamination before kids are drinking water at the tap. Right behind that is the level at which schools are willing to tolerate lead in the water."

The report found that while many states use the federal standard of 15 ppb in drinking water, some states and school districts do not inform parents of lead contamination found at schools until testing exceeds the federal threshold. As long as there is lead in the water delivery system, there is a risk of contamination, which is why the report recommends proactive, preventative solutions, including installing filters on all faucets and fountains used in drinking and cooking at schools, Rumpler said.

Overall, the report gave 22 states an "F" grade for efforts to remove lead from school drinking water. However, the exact grades are not the bottom line.

"Are any of us really satisfied with anything less than an 'A' to protect our kids health?" Rumpler said. "The overall picture is that the vast majority of states are failing to protect our kids from lead in drinking water."

**Heading to Capitol Hill**

While Environment America's report underscores a need to improve efforts to remove lead from drinking water in schools, some states actively are working to change policies and increase the use

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**- John Rumpler**

of point-of-entry (POE) and point-of-use (POU) solutions. Florida is one such state, with efforts spearheaded by water treatment specialists collaborating with legislators.

Introduced in late 2018 by Florida Sens. Janet Cruz, Lauren Book and Annette Taddeo, Senate Bill 66, if approved, would require Florida public schools built before 1986 to filter drinking water for lead at the source. The bill also would require school districts to post on their websites a list of all drinking water sources, when the filter was installed and when it will be replaced next.

The Florida Water Quality Assn. (FWQA) and the Water Quality Assn. (WQA) have encouraged Florida legislators to support the bill and provided support from the water treatment industry throughout the legislative process. FWQA members annually visit with legislators at the state's capitol, but after

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FWQA and WQA members annually visit legislators to advocate for water legislation and establish the POE/POU industry as a resource for drinking water contamination solutions.



lead contamination was discovered at the state capitol building and water fountains had to be shut off the issue became top-of-mind.

"This year when we went up to Tallahassee to make our legislative visits, water was on everybody's mind," said Amanda Moore, vice president of Atlantic Filter Corp. and president of FWQA. "People were really aware that lead was starting to become a problem that we as a state need to address."

Since then, a companion house bill was introduced by Rep. Evan Jenne. As of press time, both bills have been referred down to the appropriate education and appropriations committees, Moore said. In the meantime, FWQA is working with lobbyists and legislators to get the bills on the agenda for the current legislative session. If the bills are delayed until 2020, the association will continue to advocate for it.

One obstacle the bill faces is funding, particularly in a state where fighting blue-green algae contamination and incorporating increased security at schools following the Parkland, Fla., shooting also are priorities.

"We know that we need to make the repairs to infrastructure, but there is so much—funding for road and other infrastructure improvements—that you just have to keep fighting for water and keep reminding them that it does not matter how many roads you have for the people if you do not have the water," Moore said.

Quantifying the drinking water contamination in Florida schools is challenging because many counties do not test for lead contamination. In fact, Moore's own county has not tested the drinking water and she sends her children to school with water bottles from their home.

WQA and FWQA recommended changes to the bill, including

**"Keep fighting for water and keep reminding them that it does not matter how many roads you have for the people if you do not have the water."**

**- Amanda Moore**

recommending that all water treatment devices in schools be installed by water treatment professionals to verify performance and maintenance. The organizations also stressed the importance of installing products that are third-party certified.

"The technology to remove lead is constantly evolving, but right now the single most important thing that I feel should be taken into consideration with filtration solutions that are put into effect is whether or not they are certified," Moore said.

Rumpler also stressed the importance of using products certified for lead removal in schools.

"In many cases, the easiest, shortest-term thing to do to start protecting kids is to install filters," Rumpler said. "For your readers, I would want to emphasize and underscore we really need to make sure that we are installing filters that are certified to remove lead." **WQP**

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